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ABSTRACT

Advertising educators have a responsibility to make students aware of the importance of the mature market (older people) and to teach them methods to reach this group. An assignment in a copywriting class asked students to write and design ads to promote blue jeans to adults over 50. The assignment accomplished three things: (1) helped students erase negative stereotypes; (2) applied current research to a "real world" assignment; and (3) related copywriting to other areas of education. Research findings from the government and from the fields of gerontology, psychology, art, and communications provided insight into how to reach this varied audience; in appropriate wording, color choice, typography, and model selection; and information on appropriate media selection. Results of the assignment have been very positive. (Twenty-five references are attached. An appendix contains materials which discuss misconceptions about the mature market and make suggestions for copy appeals, design techniques, and media strategy.) (SR)

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TEACHING COPYWRITING STUDENTS ABOUT THE MATURE MARKET

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This paper reviews an assignment which asked copy students to create an ad for jeans targeted to consumers age fifty plus. This assignment is used as example of a way advertising educators can open the eyes of students about stereotypes. It also prompts a discussion of a method to teach copy which applies current research from a variety of disciplines. In the appendix, misconceptions about the mature market are discussed and suggestions for copy appeals, design techniques and media strategy are listed.

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INTRODUCTION

It seems as if we cannot attend a conference, read a scholarly journal or browse through a trade magazine without being told of the significance of the mature market. Even many of our textbooks devote space to the topic. Yet, I have found that when students are asked to define their target audience for almost any copy assignment, they routinely state "18 to 34."

I suspect my students are not alone in doing this. In fact, it seems as if the advertising industry has been guilty of the same thing. Content analyses (Gantz, Gartenberg and Rainbow 1980; Kvasnicka, Beymer and Perloff 1982; Swayne and Greco 1987 and Bramlett-Solomon and Wilson 1989) show that ads under-represent older people to the point that they are "approaching invisibility." Other studies show that ads portray older people in a negative light and alienate this important market (Festervand and Lumpkin 1985 and Powell and Williamson 1985).

A recent report in Advertising Age (Ward 1989) warns, "Marketers had better start thinking older and wiser." It is evident that the advertising industry needs writers, researchers, media planners and artists who understand this market. Our responsibility as advertising educators is to make our students aware of the importance of the market and to teach them methods to reach this group.

But aren't we doing this already? Certainly many of us bring up the topic of the mature market in our introductory course. Chances are, ageism is also discussed in the Advertising and Society course. Perhaps we bring up the topic again in Law and Ethics. Why is it, then, that our students seem to ignore this market when they arrive in Copywriting? The answer, I suspect, is that we are ignoring the market. When we limit our discussion of issues such as ageism to a theoretical setting, we are running the risk of allowing the issues to die in the classroom. If we only discuss issues in theory and never apply them in our assignments, it is as if we are saying that we are willing to talk about these things, but we do not care enough to actually do anything about them. However, when we take issues and apply them to real world assignments, they take on new importance.

In this paper, I will discuss how the issue of ageism was turned into an exercise for my Copywriting class. It was inspired by an assignment found in Advertising Age (Ward, 1989) which asked three advertising agencies and one mature-market agency to promote blue jeans to adults over fifty. By using this assignment, I was able to accomplish three things:

1. Help students erase negative stereotypes
2. Apply current research to a "real world" assignment
3. Relate Copywriting to other areas of education

THE ASSIGNMENT

This assignment was given to students enrolled in the required Copywriting course at Syracuse University. It was given late in the semester, after students had learned the basics and had written more standard assignments.

The students were given one week to write and design their ads. Two lecture/discussion sessions gave students some insight about the mature market. While students were not required to do any further research, they were encouraged to conduct informal interviews with people over fifty about their attitudes on blue jeans and advertising in general.

When I told students that their assignment was to create an ad selling jeans to people over fifty, I was not surprised to hear the comments. "They'll look silly in jeans." "They won't fit in them." "Fifty year olds simply won't buy them... except maybe for their kids." It seemed that in the minds of my students, people over fifty were lumped together into one stodgy mold. Therefore, the first of my two day lecture was devoted to erasing some of the negative stereotypes.

I started by discussing research¹ from Grey Advertising (1988) and Ogilvy & Mather (Ward, 1988) which concluded that the mature market is not one market, but several.

¹ Key points are summarized in the appendix. This information was derived from Advertising and the Mature Population: An Instructor's Manual, 1990, Drewniany, B. and Ryan, W., Copley Publishing Group, Littleton, MA.

After presenting the agencies' findings, I asked students to describe their older relatives, neighbors and professors using the agencies' terminology. The classroom became very animated because my students knew a variety of different personalities in this age range and they seemed to enjoy sharing their stories. Yes, they even knew of older people who actually wore blue jeans.

By describing personal acquaintances, students demonstrated to each other that the mature market is heterogeneous. This was a good starting point. However, there was a need to go further. Therefore, other misconceptions about older people were discussed. By the end of the first lecture, students realized that the assignment might not be as ridiculous as they first thought.

My second lecture was devoted to research which would help the students create better ads for their assignment. Research from several advertising agencies gave direction on ways to reach this varied audience. Research from the fields of gerontology and design gave further insight on appropriate wording, color choice, typography and model selection. Finally, research from the field of communications supplied information on appropriate media selection.

This information could have been presented alone without the copy assignment. However, from my experience, students retain more when they are actively involved. With this assignment, my copy students were challenged to apply the information, rather than merely memorize the data for an exam and then forget it the next day.

By discussing research findings from the government and the fields of gerontology, psychology, art and communications, I showed students why they needed a broad education to be successful copywriters. As I suspected, several of my students had studied about older people in their sociology and psychology classes. Yet, these were the very same students who typically identified their target audience as 18 to 34 years old. It seems they needed the opportunity to apply the information from other fields before they could make the connection in their minds.

RESULTS

The results of this assignment have been very positive. One graduate student got so intrigued by this assignment that she decided to research the mature market for her thesis. A graduating senior put her ad in her portfolio and received high praise for her understanding of the market during interviews. In fact, several agencies voiced how pleased they were that students were learning about this market.

By using the blue jeans assignment originally found in Advertising Age, I was able to show the students what advertising professionals did when they were faced with the same challenge.

Certainly, there are other products or ideas that could be substituted. For example, students could be asked to write an ad selling microwave ovens to people in retirement homes. Here, the challenge is to sell a product normally

associated with time savings to people who have a lot of free time. Students could be asked to create an ad for one of the magazines written for people over fifty. It would be interesting to see how they would take on the challenge of competing with Modern Maturity, the nation's leading magazine in circulation. Another assignment could be to create an ad convincing older people to return to college and earn degrees. Considering the recent drops in college enrollment, this assignment could be quite relevant.

The mature market is just one of many issues which be used as a topic. Certainly, minorities and children could make equally important assignments. The point is, as advertising educators, we must strive to go beyond the basics in our classes. We must take on the challenge of helping students erase negative stereotypes. We must help students understand that there is great value to their broad education. We must not allow research findings to gather dust in the library, but we must try to translate the wealth of information into meaningful assignments.

APPENDIX

Myth	Reality
The mature market is poor.	Fifty-plus Americans control half this country's discretionary income and 77% of its assets (Grey Advertising, 1988). Americans over fifty have \$800 billion in annual income after taxes are skimmed off. That translates into 42% of all consumer income, compared to 26% controlled by people under 35 (Ward, 1988). The 65-74 cohort has the highest percentage of discretionary income of any ten-year cohort (Wolfe, 1987). After meeting expenditures associated with normal living expenses, the mature consumer has considerable discretionary income, to save, or to spend. It translates to an average of more than \$5000 per year for mature consumers (Day, et al., 1987-1988).
Mature consumers are brand loyal—it's a waste to advertise to them.	Mature consumers are willing to switch brands. 22% of mature consumers said they were "extremely" willing to try new brands of products (Rothenberg, 1988). According to a survey conducted by Grey Advertising (1988): • 82% of mature consumers said they were open to new products. • 84% said they'd switch if a new product or service seemed to be more for "people like me."
Mature consumers are passive.	Over 51% of mature consumers indicated that they would discontinue use of a product if the ad promoting it was offensive (Festervand & Lumpkin, 1985). According to Moschis (Sharkey, 1988): Nearly 1/3 said they have boycotted a product because of the way advertising portrayed them.

Myth	Reality
Mature consumers buy solely on price.	Like the general population, some mature consumers are extremely price conscious, some are not. Mature consumers' years of experience in buying means that they can often assess value more astutely than younger consumers.
Most mature Americans live in nursing homes and therefore don't do much shopping.	Only 5% of those 65 years old and older live in institutional settings. Over 75% of mature Americans own their own homes. Homeowners, age 50 and up, pay for 44% of all home remodeling projects (Hinds, 1988). According to <i>American Demographics</i> , in 1984, households in the 55-64 age group spent about 11% more than average households on home furnishings.
The mature market is homogeneous.	The mature market is as diverse as the general population. Mature Americans can be married, widowed, separated, divorced, remarried, or never married. Mature Americans come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
Mature consumers buy only practical necessities.	After an adult lifetime of self-denial, while buying a home and educating a family, the older consumer represents a "promising market" for the leisure industry and for luxury goods (Linden, 1985). Eating out has increased 21% among over 50s since 1978 compared to only 6% for all adults (Ward, 1988).
The elderly are sickly.	The elderly feel better than you think. In fact, according to Ward (1988, p. 15), people over sixty-five indicate that they feel better physically than most forty-to-forty-nine year olds. Over 65% of individuals age 65 and older view themselves as having good to excellent health.

GREY ADVERTISING (1988) IDENTIFIED THREE GROUPS:

1. MasterConsumers who are fit, active, secure and fulfilled

- 70% are between 50 and 64
- 78% are married and living with their spouses
- 50% are still working

2. Maintainers are healthy and financially comfortable, but are not as active as they would like to be

- 52% are between 50 and 64
- 60% have retired

3. Simplifiers are interested in streamlining their lives and tend to be light consumers of goods

OGILVY & MATHER (Ward, 1988) IDENTIFIED TWO GROUPS:

1. Luckies who are age 50 to 64 and have enjoyed considerable financial success.

- They "found their expectations exceeded" in the economic boom following World War II.
- They are relaxed about spending money
- They feel younger than their birth certificate might indicate

2. Saavies are age 65 plus and entered the work force during the Depression.

- They are astute buyers
- The hard times they lived through taught them the value of the dollar

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Include the elderly in the picture.
2. Portray them as socially involved.
3. Don't remind them of their vulnerability.
4. Cast models that reflect the right physical image.
5. Use sex appeal.
6. Show them experiencing new things, trying new products.
7. Put them in the spotlight.
8. Don't isolate them.
9. Give them facts.
10. Show them as productive and worthy of respect.

COLOR AND TYPOGRAPHY RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR ADS TARGETED TO A MATURE AUDIENCE

Color

Use high contrast.

Avoid using intense yellow on black

Avoid combining tones and shades of the same color

Use green/blue/violet combinations with caution

Typography

Avoid ornate typefaces and italics

Set body copy in twelve point type

Use upper and lowercase type

Combine type with graphic symbols, when possible

MAGAZINES FOR THE MATURE MARKET

General:

Golden Years
Mature Outlook
McCall's Silver
New Choices
Modern Maturity

Regional:

California Senior Citizen
New York Senior Citizen
Sun Cities Life

Special Interest:

The Senior Golfer
Trailer Life
Walking Magazine

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